Good morning everyone, and welcome. Bonjour à vous tous et bienvenue.

I want to begin by thanking you for joining us. We have a great day ahead—a day that will bring with it important ideas, discussions and debates... all in service of making our Federation more relevant and effective in the lives of Canadians, and more responsive to our membership.

En tant que président, je peux vous assurer que je suis impatient d’entendre en particulier le point de vue de mes prédécesseurs—and de puiser inspiration de leurs réflexions et de leurs idées sur la voie qu’il conviendrait d’emprunter ensemble en cette période importante.

Let me begin by encouraging you all to pause for a moment over the course of the day—just stop and take stock of this gathering of remarkable people. It is truly an honour to stand among and alongside so many gifted individuals—men and women who believe in the power of the social sciences and humanities to make a positive and lasting contribution to our society and our world.

I always find myself uplifted and energized after spending time with so many people of substance, creativity and determination.

By now, you are all well aware that we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of our organization. Milestones like these are important—not only to honour the legacy and effort of those who came before us, but also to recommit ourselves to the pursuit of even greater achievement in the future.

When that small group of Canadian scholars—including political economist Harold Innis, Educator John E Robbins and Historian R.G. Trotter—gathered here in Ottawa three quarters of a century ago, it was a dark period for Europe and for the world. We feel echoes today. The difficult times naturally prompted both introspection and aspiration among the great minds of their era.
Sitting together at the Chateau Laurier, these scholars were ambitious in their thinking about Canada. They asked of each other: What kind of country do we want to be? And how can we, through our research and our contributions, help Canadians to a better understanding of who we are, how we got here and where together we might go?

Aujourd’hui, le Canada est un pays plus mûr et accompli. Moins de deux ans nous séparent du 150e anniversaire de la Confédération, un jalon marquant en soi. Mais ces mêmes questions continuent de se poser, tout comme subsiste pour la Fédération la possibilité d’aider à trouver les réponses qui permettront à notre pays de progresser.

Our shared goal must be to engage with the wider world. It can be rewarding and intellectually invigorating to dive into discussions and debates with one another, and amongst ourselves. But to achieve our potential, we must strive to have our voices heard in policy matters, in the budget process and in the other key social and cultural processes that affect our communities and our country.

Public engagement of this sort adds value to the work of researchers—and increases its impact. It draws attention to the importance of the social sciences and humanities. And, most important of all, it helps provide the ideas, the information and even the impetus required to build a better society.

I want to take a moment to tell you about the archival research project we undertook this past year. To help mark our anniversary, we have created an interactive digital timeline that documents the life of our Federation—the challenges it has overcome, and the progress it has helped achieve.

I believe that Harold Innis and his colleagues would marvel at what Canada has achieved over the past 75 years…

...at Canada’s maturation into a relatively progressive and independent nation...

... at our commitment to the protection of rights and freedoms...

And at the growth of post-secondary education, a pursuit that today enriches the lives not only of the elites but of more than half of Canadian adults.

Today, we have a dynamic and innovative network of colleges and universities across the country. As scholars, we benefit from granting councils that would exceed the wildest dreams of Innes and his peers. Truly, we have taken great strides.

Yet there are issues that remain and must be confronted—important issues related to diversity, Indigenous peoples and gender equity. And there are other challenges of which we are all well aware.
Let’s be candid about our position today.

Enrollment in social sciences and humanities is down nationally.

Our disciplines are too often undervalued or overlooked in political and business discourse, prompting some parents and students to buy into misconceptions about our relevance and value within university education.

Et une pression accrue s’exerce sur les chercheurs en sciences humaines pour qu’ils se départissent d’une part de l’offre de financement de la recherche qui ne progresse tout simplement pas au même rythme que la croissance de notre communauté. Cette situation laisse trop de jeunes chercheurs sans soutien adéquat. Comment peuvent-ils espérer réaliser leur potentiel sans les outils et les ressources pour ce faire?

So, yes, we face pressures. And yes, showcasing the impact and contribution of research in social sciences and the humanities remains a challenge—one that we’ll explore in greater detail during the workshops this afternoon.

But this is not a time for cynicism, nor time to throw up our hands in frustration. To the contrary: In order to achieve our goals, we are going to have to work harder than ever; and work better together.

We need to sustain a continuous, persuasive and positive conversation with public agencies, governments, the private sector, civil society and the public.

Pour que ce dialogue influe sur les décisions, nous devons encourager et habiliter notre communauté à agir de concert avec une efficacité accrue en utilisant le pouvoir de notre réseau tout entier pour faire valoir au mieux notre cause collective. Et, pour être franc, nous avons besoin de nous atteler à cette tâche tout de suite.

Today, there is reason for optimism—in the talent of our members; in our historic ability to help shape and drive important policy innovation; and, now, in the opportunities provided by a change in government.

I, for one, was heartened by the fact that the role of science in democracy, good policy and government emerged as an important underlying theme in the recent federal election.

We all know the critical function of science and research has been diminished within government over the last decade. But this is a new time, with new leadership. We have reason to be optimistic—but we must also be vigilant and vocal in our defence of the sciences writ large and in our ongoing advocacy for their essential role in policy creation and social and cultural evolution.

The reinstatement of the long-form census was an important first step. The apparent removal of restrictions on the communication of federal scientists is another. We now look forward to the
government delivering on its commitments to ensure greater independence for Statistics Canada and to appoint a chief science officer.

It is my view—and I’m sure it is a view shared widely within this room—that the CSO, and the new government more broadly, must consider not only natural sciences and engineering but also the social sciences and humanities. Each of these areas can contribute to better policy and better solutions as we move back toward a public policy process that is supported by evidence and expertise.

Early next month, a new Parliament will open. The representatives of the people of Canada will gather—almost 200 of them taking seats in the House of Commons for the first time. A new cabinet, with men and women in equal numbers. More Aboriginal MPs than ever before.

Ce nouveau Parlement aura un profil et un mode de fonctionnement dissemblables de ceux de son prédécesseur. Le ton de ce gouvernement est assurément différent. Il se montre ouvert aux idées et déterminé à accorder à la science et aux chercheurs l’espace dont ils ont besoin et l’attention qu’ils méritent.

At the same time, as men and women who value research and understand its crucial role in a modern knowledge society, we have a responsibility to hold the government to its word—and to make a meaningful contribution.

In the coming months, we have an important opportunity—the opportunity to show this new government who we are, what we stand for and how we can contribute; the opportunity to demonstrate our ability to make a difference and play a role in advancing the “science” agenda of the new government.

Our participation can take a number of forms. To cite just a couple of examples:

- We can help to rebuild and renew Statscan and Library & Archives Canada.
- We can contribute to shaping an inclusive digital architecture.
- And we can contribute suggestions for how to best innovate policy making to ensure it is informed with research and evidence from social sciences and the humanities.

To take advantage of the opportunities before us—and to meet our responsibilities to students and to society at large—we must move forward, I believe, guided by four key priorities, which cannot be emphasized enough.

The first priority: A greater focus on interdisciplinarity. Put simply, we need it and we have made good strides in recent years—but we need to go further. The old days of working exclusively within narrow walls are gone. It is incumbent on us to demonstrate how working across disciplines can help bring the innovation and insight needed in so many areas.
Second: Greater international and intercultural awareness.

For our researchers and our students, particularly, success now and in the coming decades requires intercultural understanding and connectivity. Look at the cultural diversity of our biggest cities: Visible minority groups comprise 63 percent of the population of Toronto, 59 percent in Vancouver, and 31 percent in Montreal. Canadian universities are microcosms of this diversity. But intercultural fluency does not just happen because diverse groups are thrown together.

Nous devons constituer et modéliser les compétences qui permettent aux Canadiens de fonctionner efficacement à l’intérieur de nos frontières diversifiées sur le plan culturel et de participer avec le reste du monde dans une société de plus en plus interconnectée au niveau mondial. Cela exige, entre autres choses, d’accroître la mobilité internationale de nos étudiants. Actuellement, moins de trois pour cent des étudiants universitaires canadiens s’absentent chaque année du pays pour parfaire leurs expériences éducatives.

Et nous devons valoriser et promouvoir l’enseignement, l’apprentissage et la création du savoir qui découle de l’interaction et de l’établissement de relations avec des interlocuteurs d’horizons linguistiques et culturels différents sur les campus.

Our third priority: Building a more open and inclusive knowledge society.

Many of you here today contribute to the resilience of our society by improving our understanding of participation, equity, diversity and inclusion.

We must keep asking tough questions, and researching the often painful answers. For example: who is participating and benefiting in our knowledge intensive society and economy? Aggregate economic growth numbers are not enough to assess the health of our society.

In particular, Aboriginal reconciliation remains one of the central challenges of our time. I look forward to our discussions on this today including hearing from Wab Kinew and our distinguished panel.

And the fourth priority: helping to develop a more engaged and active citizenry.

It is the mission of education and research to engage people and communities.

Bon nombre d’entre vous connaissent l’initiative Fusion Jeunesse basée au Québec. Ce programme novateur place des modèles et des mentors dans des écoles défavorisées pour raviver l’intérêt des élèves dans l’apprentissage. Fusion Jeunesse a commencé par créer un partenariat avec l’Université Concordia, en recrutant des coordonnateurs de projet enthousiastes qui avaient des bagages scolaires dans les domaines d’intérêt des élèves du secondaire.
Ces coordonnateurs ont contribué à la conduite de projets qui ont stimulé la participation des élèves—par exemple, ceux qui ont une formation en journalisme ont lancé des journaux dirigés par des jeunes, tandis que les étudiants en danse contemporaine ont proposé des classes et lancé des troupes de danse.

The project was a resounding success, and is expanding across Quebec and Canada. In the course of setting it up, what the founders concluded was that a key to the program’s success was ensuring that students were learning about things that interested them.

We need to remember that, and celebrate the passion that lives in so many to study arts and social sciences—and how this engages the mind and soul, equipping and enabling citizens to tackle the issues we face as individuals and as a society.

When you review our history as a group, when you examine the nature and scope of our achievements, you find that we have always been strongest and most influential when we have stood together.

The humanities and the social sciences—standing together.

The scholarly associations—standing together.

Our words and guidance carry more sway when spoken in a united voice.

That’s certainly been true historically. Think of the change we’ve helped bring in combating issues of gender bias in the academy, or promoting bilingualism. And think of the role we’re playing today in helping to shape the national agenda, with our call to reinstate the long-form census, amend Bill C-51, respond more quickly and humanely to the Syrian refugee crisis and engage in true reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples.

Our voice carries weight when we speak with the force of experience, evidence and understanding on the issues that matter most to the people of Canada.

Our best way to make swift and lasting progress in these areas is through the power of united action.

With that in mind, I want to say a word now about membership engagement.

We are about to embark on our 2016-2021 strategic plan. As I’ve already mentioned, we sense an opportunity before us—and we seek to grab hold of it. But as a group, we will only ever be as strong as our members make us. The more you engage with us, the greater our ability to support members in defining and shaping the social and cultural debates ahead.

Rien de tout cela ne peut se faire sans vous et sans le soutien de vos collègues dans votre milieu. Nous avons besoin que vous devieniez des partenaires avec nous—partenaires au sein d’un réseau dynamique et transformationnel. Nous avons besoin de vos idées, de votre énergie, de votre attachement à l’heure où nous tentons de saisir le moment charnière permettant de renforcer le futur de la recherche et de l’éducation en sciences humaines au Canada.
I invite all of you here to become more active; socially and culturally engaged both inside and outside your university walls. In doing so, I encourage you to play a role not only in defending what we do, but also in articulating our value. We have the capacity to make a positive difference in the life of Canada—and in the lives of Canadians.

Today, as a federation, we are rightly proud of our history—but our focus must be on the next 75 years, and on all we can help our societies to accomplish through our work, our ideas and our collective dedication.

We live in a time in which young adults are told by some that higher education has merit only as a direct conduit to a job...that the only degrees of value are those of a technical or professional nature. The danger is that they forget about their passions—and turn off their curiosity to explore new fields and ideas.

We must demonstrate with our efforts and our actions the eternal relevance of the social sciences and humanities.

We shouldn’t be afraid of asking, and helping to answer, the big questions. We have a duty to ourselves and to our country to be bold in advancing our perspectives about what Canada should strive to achieve over its next 150 years.

It was Northrop Frye who reminded us: It is our job and our joy, “… to produce, out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in.”

Our vision is one in which Canadians are encouraged to make contributions that help us to better understand ourselves and our world. As we look ahead, we should do so with confidence.

Nous avons du pain sur la planche. Mais je regarde autour de cette salle, et j’ai la conviction que nous serons à la hauteur du défi.

We have our work cut out for us. But I look around this room, and I know we are up to the challenge.

Thank you. Merci.